



COMMUNITY RESOURCE BULLETIN

January: Fighting Post-Holiday Depression

Feeling depressed is “common” among seniors, but not “normal”

“The darkest hour is just before the dawn.” —Thomas Fuller, British Historian

We’ve probably all experienced post-holiday blues at some point. After the rush of joy at being together with family and friends, giving and receiving gifts, and non-stop holiday rushing, you’re left with the January “blahs.” Seniors, especially, may experience sad feelings after the holidays, leading to depression. It’s important to keep an eye on the emotional state of the older people in your life, as they themselves may not even realize they’re heading toward depression.



What to Look For

Elderly family members may show signs of being more irritable, more anxious, or not as talkative as they once were. They may also not return phone calls, don’t keep the house as clean, may have lost interest in activities they once enjoyed, find it hard to stay asleep, and may have lost their appetite.

How to Help

Getting seniors who feel lonely and isolated out of the house will do wonders. Socializing with others will help ease those feelings. Take time to visit weekly, or if you’re out of town or have work or other time conflicts, consider having one of our “Angels” provide caring companionship. And, if well enough, you can also encourage them to take advantage of the local senior center’s programs, such as bingo, dancing, and exercise classes. Should you suspect depression in your loved one, seek medical advice. They may benefit significantly from antidepressants and/or other forms of therapy.

LOCAL RESOURCES:

- ★ Mercer County Office on Aging, 609-989-6661
- ★ Burlington County Office on Aging, 609-265-5069

Contributing Factors to Depression

Folks over 65 may feel down after the holidays for several reasons. All the hustle and bustle of the holidays may have physically exhausted many seniors. They may experience loneliness at the fact they won’t see family again for many months. They may also be concerned about their finances after their holiday purchases, sadness at recalling loved ones who are no longer living, and perhaps they fear declining health while being alone.

Wishing a HAPPY and Healthy New Year to All!

Phone: (609) 883-8188

www.NJSeniorCare.com

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Facts About Depression in Older People



While clinical depression in older people is common, it doesn't mean it's a normal part of getting older. Roughly 6 million people aged 65 and older in the U.S. are depressed, but only about 10% are treated. Many people don't realize older people display different symptoms of depression than younger people.

How Depression Is Different in Older People

- It can be triggered by seniors' medical illnesses and disabilities
- It frequently increases seniors' risk of cardiac diseases
- It increases their risk of death from illnesses
- It can significantly reduce their ability to rehabilitate and recover
- It also increases the risk of suicide, particularly in white older men (in white men aged 80-84, the suicide rate is more than twice the general population)
- Signs of depression are often missed by family and physicians since older people are "expected" to slow down as they age
- Insomnia is typically a symptom of depression in seniors
- Antidepressants often take longer to work in older people, and the length of treatment is longer than in younger people

Risk Factors for Depression in Older People

- Being a woman
- Being widowed, divorced, or single
- Lacking a supportive social network
- Having recently endured stressful life events (loss of loved one, moving from family home, etc)
- Taking certain medications or combinations of medications which contribute to depression
- Having a fear of dying
- Being socially isolated; living alone
- Having prior attempts at taking one's own life
- Having a previous history of depression in self or in family
- Bearing chronic or severe pain
- Having had body changes (cancer surgery, amputation, cancer surgery)

Tips for Helping An Older Person Who Is Depressed

It is possible to noticeably improve the quality of life for an older person who suffers from depression.

List of suggestions to assist in encouraging a more healthy life for an older person who is depressed:

- **Make sure to seek professional treatment.** Identifying depression and treating it appropriately is sometimes the key to breaking the depression cycle, and a necessary first step.
- **Encourage the person to follow through with treatment.** Depression usually reoccurs when treatment is stopped too soon. If the prescribed treatment isn't helping, look into other medications and therapies, or even other professionals. There are few trained geriatricians and sometimes physicians suffer from ageism, as do other professionals. Neither depression nor dementia is a normal component of aging.
- **Invite the person out.** Depression is less likely when a person's body and mind remain active. Suggest activities the person used to enjoy: walks, an art class, a trip to the museum or the movies—anything that provides mental or physical stimulation.
- **Schedule regular social activities.** Group outings, visits from friends and family members or trips to the local senior or community center can help combat isolation and loneliness. Be gently insistent if the suggested plans are refused: depressed people often feel better when they're around others, but they may need some encouragement to get there.
- **Plan and prepare healthy meals,** or see to it that the depressed person has balanced meals available and is actually eating those meals. A poor diet can make depression worse. Every meal should include plenty of fruit, vegetables, whole grains and some protein.
- **Ensure all medications are taken as instructed.** There are many types of medical reminder devices, including electronic devices that actually beep if medications are missed. Remind the person to obey doctor's orders about the use of alcohol while on medication. Help the person remember when to take prescribed doses, or assist in getting a device in place that works.
- **Watch for suicide warning signs,** which include feeling hopeless or trapped, withdrawing from family and friends, experiencing dramatic mood changes, and talking or writing about death, dying or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person. Seek immediate professional help if it is suspected that the person is thinking about taking their own life. Time is of the essence.



Visiting Angels can help seniors feel less isolated by providing compassionate care and friendly companionship.

www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_elderly.htm

Understanding the Differences Between Dementia and Depression

Troubled by the early warning signs of dementia? First rule out that it is not depression. To receive proper diagnosis and care, it is critical to ensure that the symptoms are from dementia and not depression.

Dementia is a brain disorder.

Depression is a mood disorder.



Is it Dementia or Depression?

Symptoms of Dementia

- Mental decline happens slowly
- Confused and disoriented; becomes lost in familiar locations
- Difficulty with short-term memory
- Writing, speaking and motor skills are impaired
- Doesn't notice memory problems or seem to care

Symptoms of Depression

- Mental decline is relatively rapid
- Knows the correct time, date, and where he or she is
- Difficulty concentrating
- Language and motor skills are slow, but normal
- Notices or worries about memory problems

Memory Screening Questions

Memory screenings make sense for anyone concerned for themselves or others about memory loss or who are experiencing warning signs of dementia (see below), as well as those who believe they are at risk due to a family history of Alzheimer's disease or a related illness.

These questions might help. If the answer is "yes" to any of them, a memory screening might be helpful.

- ☐ Yes ☐ No Am I becoming more forgetful?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Do I have trouble concentrating?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Do I have difficulty performing familiar tasks?

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- ☐ Yes ☐ No Do I have trouble recalling words or names in conversation?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Do I sometimes forget where I am?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Have family or friends told me that I am repeating questions or saying the same thing over and over again?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Am I misplacing things more often?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Have I become lost when walking or driving in a familiar neighborhood?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Have my family or friends noticed changes in my mood, behavior, personality, or desire to do things?

Note: A memory screening is not used to diagnose any particular illness and does not replace consultation with a qualified physician or other healthcare professional. Sometimes a memory screening is beneficial to establish a baseline.

Warning Signs of Dementia:

- ☐ Trouble with new memories
- ☐ Trouble finding words
- ☐ Confusion about time, place or people
- ☐ Onset of new depression or irritability
- ☐ Personality changes
- ☐ Seeing or hearing things
- ☐ Relying on memory helpers
- ☐ Struggling to complete familiar actions
- ☐ Misplacing familiar objects
- ☐ Making bad decisions
- ☐ Loss of interest in important responsibilities
- ☐ Expressing false beliefs